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1995

BFREE

2026 VISITOR GUIDE

ABOUT BFREE

The Belize Foundation for Research and Environmental Education (BFREE) is a US-registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization founded in 1995 with the primary goal of preserving the tropical rainforests of Belize. To achieve this, BFREE acquired 1,153 acres of forested land and established a privately protected area and biological field station strategically located at the foothills of the Maya Mountains. The BFREE property borders four national parks and is at the gateway to the Bladen Nature Reserve, the crown jewel of Belize's protected areas system.

BFREE's mission is "to conserve the biodiversity and cultural heritage of Belize." As the only field station in this biologically significant area, we seek to achieve our conservation mission through research and environmental education programs. We provide logistical support and facilities to visiting scientists and students, promote and facilitate research and conservation of tropical forests, develop and implement environmental education programs for students from Belize and other countries, and enhance alternative livelihoods for local community members. For thirty years, BFREE has hosted Field Courses and visitors just like you.

ABOUT BELIZE

Language

English is the official language. However, Spanish, creole, three dialects of Maya, and Garifuna languages are all spoken.

Time

Belize's time is fixed all year. Depending on the US Daylight savings status, Belize is either 1 or 2 hours behind Eastern time.

Money

The Belizean dollar is exchanged at a fixed rate with the US dollar (\$1US = \$2BZ). US dollars are accepted if they are clean, un torn bills. 10s and 20s are most accepted. ATM machines are available at the airport. Credit cards are accepted in most tourist areas. Traveler's checks are not widely accepted. Personal checks are not accepted.

Food

The typical diet in Belize consists of rice, beans, tropical fruit, tortillas, eggs and chicken.



ABOUT THE BFREE FIELD STATION

BFREE borders four protected areas: including the Bladen Nature Reserve, Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, Deep River Forest Reserve, and Maya Mountain Forest Reserve - all are part of the larger Maya Mountain block of 14 protected areas covering over 1.5 million acres of continuous tropical forest. The land sits about 60 meters above sea level on a rich alluvial soil matrix. Habitat types include various tropical forest types and aquatic systems, including marshes, streams, ponds, and the Bladen River. The average tree canopy height is about 25 meters, with emergent trees reaching 45-50 meters. The average rainfall is 140 inches per year. Wildlife is abundant, and it is not unusual to view a troop of Howler monkeys, a Harpy eagle, or a flock of Scarlet macaws from the dining room.

Facilities

Approximately 40 acres of the land is under some type of development, including the field station facilities, a 25-acre cacao agroforestry farm, a 2-acre organic orchard, and an extensive trail network. Facilities include the Hammock, a dormitory-style building with six private rooms that sleeps 24, three private cabins, kitchen & dining room, staff housing, Science Lab, Hicatee Conservation and Research Center (HCRC), office, Chocolate Lab, BFREE Library and Classroom (projector available), herbarium, workshop, composting bathroom facilities, showers, helicopter landing site, and a canopy observation tower.

Cabins

Three private cabins are nestled comfortably in the forests and though very private, are centrally located. Each cabin is furnished with two handcrafted hardwood beds, a desk and chair, and a wardrobe. Cabins are equipped with a fan, light, sink and outlets. Guests are provided with pillows, linens, and a light-weight blanket.

The Hammock

The Hammock was built in 2020 with six private rooms and a wrap-around veranda. Guests are provided with pillows, linens, and a blanket. Each room has a ceiling fan, lights, outlets and a sink. Outdoor showers are available a few steps away, and a four-stall composting bathroom is close by.

*Mosquito nets are available by request.

Composting Toilets

Designed and constructed at BFREE, composting toilets are situated throughout the property. Using no water, these environmentally-friendly facilities conserve water and produce compost for the BFREE orchards.

Power

BFREE is powered by solar electricity. Outlets are available in each cabin, at the Hammock, in the Commons and BFREE classroom.

Internet & Phone

BFREE has limited internet service that we reserve for office use. Cell signal is available in some locations on the property. We recommend investigating international calling through your service provider. WhatsApp is the most commonly used international messaging platform and you'll find that many Belizean businesses use it for guest communications. *The BFREE office phone may be used in case of an emergency.*

Meals

Meals are prepared by our onsite chef and are served at set times: Bfast - 7:30 AM, Lunch - Noon, Dinner - 6:30 PM

Dietary Restrictions / Allergies

Please note any dietary restrictions on your Health & Contact form. *With advance notice*, we will do our best to accommodate your dietary needs.

PACKING GUIDE



The following list is suggested for 8 days:

ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES:

- Flashlights and/or headlamp along with extra batteries (strong beam for night hikes)
- Towel - lightweight/quick-dry ones are best (two towels are recommended during longer stays)
- Insect repellent (deet-free if possible)
- Reusable water bottle
- Toiletry kit: Include all of the items that you would normally use; please bring biodegradable soap and shampoo
- Small day pack or backpack for daytime excursions
- Personal first aid supplies: Band-Aids, moleskin, Tylenol, Benadryl, rehydration salts (electrolyte powder), a laxative, Imodium/Pepto Bismol, anti-itch cream, a topical antibiotic cream, and an anti-fungal cream or powder
- Ziplocs or dry bag (for keeping items clean and dry)

CLOTHING ESSENTIALS:

- 5 loose lightweight, quick-dry LONG-sleeved shirts
- 5 pair lightweight loose LONG pants.
- 5 lightweight cotton t-shirts
- Swimsuit
- Sweatshirt or jacket for cool nights
- 1 week supply of socks and underwear
- Footwear - 1 pair of water shoes & 1 pair of comfortable hiking boots or rubber boots (already broken in)

TRAVEL PAPERWORK:

- Passport
- Name and number of your physician
- List of credit card numbers and numbers to cancel/replace in case of loss or theft.
- Copies of passport in several locations in case of loss of passport. (leave a copy with a relative/friend in the USA and put one in your luggage)

OPTIONAL:

- Camera and Binoculars
- Sunglasses, polarized lenses are best
- Mask, snorkel, and fins
- Emergen-C or other Rehydration salts
- Books, crosswords, small games to play at night
- Earplugs for better sleeping
- Rain Poncho
- Hat
- Swimmer's ear drops

The packing list is a guideline to help prepare you for your trip to BFREE. We recommend leaving any non-essential items at home. As a basic rule, if you cannot get along without it, bring a spare or maybe two. This applies to contact lenses and glasses, flashlights, and personal medications.

Luggage

Pack as light as possible and be sure you can carry your own luggage without assistance in one load.

Clothing

The best, safest defense against insects and the elements is to cover up with long sleeves, long socks, and long pants. Bring clothing that is practical, comfortable, and socially appropriate. Pack lightweight, quick-dry fabrics. Denim jeans and other thick materials do not dry well in humid weather. For hiking and field activities, bring clothing that can get wet and muddy.

Footwear

Footwear should be comfortable, already broken in, and suited to the terrain. We recommend a pair of lightweight hiking boots or rubber boots (muck boots). Remember to include a pair of water shoes or sandals that can get wet. Teva, KEEN, Choco, or Crocs all make great shoes for this.

Flashlights/Headlamps

One flashlight and one headlamp each are essential for walking around BFREE after dark and in the early morning hours. Black Diamond and Petzel make great lights with strong beams and rechargeable batteries. If these are too expensive for your budget, choose one with the strongest beam. Pack plenty of extra batteries! And don't forget to take your used batteries home with you for disposal.

Linens

BFREE provides bed sheets and light-weight blankets. Guests must pack their own towels.

**Guests may also choose to bring a fleece blanket if they are visiting during December or January.*

FIELD STATION POLICIES

RESPECT NATURE & BFREE GROUNDS:

- No molesting, harming, or killing of any wildlife (including venomous snakes)
- No chopping brush or marking trees with machetes or other tools
- Apply bug spray away from other people and outside of buildings (including outside of the cabins and bunkhouse)
- Do not swim alone or at night
- Flagging should be removed, and borrowed field equipment returned immediately upon completion of projects
- Campfires are permitted in the designated fire pit with permission from BFREE staff
- No smoking in any BFREE buildings
- Pets are not allowed
- Check your surrounding before sitting on a log or on the ground
- Look out for holes when walking - especially on leaf littered trails or in the cacao farm

HEALTH & SAFETY:

- Inform BFREE staff of medical conditions or allergies immediately upon arrival
- Stay hydrated by carrying a water bottle at all times
- Report injuries or illness to BFREE staff and the group leader immediately
- Carry and use flashlights when walking around from twilight to sunrise

TRAILS:

- Travel in pairs and inform BFREE staff before hiking and approximate time of return
- Do not litter. Pick up trash along trails and dispose of it properly
- Always stay on trails or make sure there is someone to guide you back to trail if you need to go off trail

THE HAMMOCK & CABIN RULES:

- Leave shoes outside the building
- Keep doors closed, turn lights and fans off when not in use
- Keep food and perishables in a sealed container
- 9 p.m. is quiet time—please turn off the music and talk softly in all buildings
- Dispose of food waste in compost piles
- Hang wet clothes on designated clothes lines, not on railings

ALCOHOL:

- Beer & cokes are available for sale in limited supply at the Cool Spot from 5-6 daily
- Visitors may not bring outside alcohol to the BFREE field station
- Do not offer BFREE staff alcohol; we adhere to a strict no-drinking policy

CONTACT INFO

FIELD STATION

Mailing Address (No boxes):

PO BOX 129
Punta Gorda, Belize,
Central America

LOCATION:

Mile 58 Southern Highway
Toledo, Belize, Central America
contact@bfreebz.org

OFFICE PHONE:

011-501-621-6685

*Belize country code 011 must be added
when calling from the states

US OFFICE

Mailing Address:

3520 NW 43rd Street
Gainesville, FL 32606

INSTAGRAM:

@BFREEBZ

FACEBOOK:

@BFREEBZ

US OFFICE PHONE:

352-681-0560



HEALTH & SAFETY

To keep our staff and visitors safe, BFREE requests If you begin to exhibit cold or flu symptoms during your travel, please notify BFREE staff immediately and begin to use a face mask.

PUBLIC HEALTH & SANITATION:

Levels of public health in Belize compare favorably with those of developed countries. Although it is a tropical country, Belize has largely eradicated, controlled, or simply avoided the tropical diseases that plague other countries in the region: cholera, yellow fever, amoebic dysentery, and others. Various tropical diseases are present at very low levels including malaria, dengue fever, Leischmaniasis, rabies, and skin parasites. All visitors to Belize should visit a reputable international travel clinic to receive the appropriate immunizations (or check with the World Health Organization www.who.int). Tap water is generally safe to drink anywhere, but ask first and never drink from streams. If you are somewhat new to travel, you may experience brief stomach and intestinal upsets during the trip as your system adjust to a different set of microorganisms. BFREE has filtered well water that is safe to drink. You can bring iodine tablets if you are particularly sensitive. There is no safe medication to protect you against this problem, but it generally passes quickly. Any time you have diarrhea, for whatever cause, keep drinking fluids (with electrolyte powder if available) for proper rehydration and replacement of minerals.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION PLAN:

BFREE has two evacuation plans in cases of medical emergency:

In critical emergencies, Astrum Helicopter Service will evacuate the patient from BFREE to the country's premier private clinic.

Astrum Helicopter Service

Tel [011-501]-222-5100 After hours 610-4381

USA - 888-ASTRUM4 or 888-278-7864

Belize Medical Associates

Tel [011-501]-223-0302; 223-0303; 223-0304

5791 St. Thomas St. Kings Park P.O. Box 1008

Belize City, Belize

www.belizemedical.com bzemedasso@btl.net

The individual's emergency contact will be notified. If necessary, the individual will be flown to a hospital in Florida or Texas either by an international "life-flight" or on the next commercial jet. In non-critical emergencies, individuals will be driven out from BFREE to Punta Gorda Town or Independence Village (45 minutes from BFREE, where the nearest emergency clinic is located) and driven or flown to Belize Medical Associates in Belize City (information above).

STAYING HEALTHY POINTERS:

Chances are that you will stay healthy throughout your travels. To be on the safe side, here are some important tips to minimize the chance you will be ill on the trip. Refer to them as a reference during your trip, and use them as guidelines during any future travel.

- **Avoid dehydration.** Drink plenty of fluids, even if you do not feel particularly thirsty. Remember that alcohol and caffeine are both dehydrating agents. Lack of urination, concentrated (dark) urine, headache, exhaustion, and sunken eyes can be important dehydration signs.
- **Use sunscreen and clothing to minimize your exposure to UV radiation.** At the beach, wear a T-shirt or swim shirt over your swimsuit when you are in the water, especially when snorkeling. When you are in the sun, keep drinking fluids and avoid alcohol.
- **Pay attention to scrapes and cuts, as bacteria grow rapidly in tropical conditions.** A small scratch that you would ignore at home can quickly become a serious infection in the tropics! Wash cuts with clean water and soap, apply disinfectant and keep the wound clean. Inform a BFREE staff member at once at the first sign of infection (pain, swelling, redness, or discharge).
- **Avoid going barefoot,** especially in remote human settlements, as you can pick up infections, parasites, insect stings, bites by other animals, and thorns.
- **Wash your hands frequently,** especially after using the bathroom and before eating.
- **Protect yourself from mosquito and other insect bites** by wearing light-weight, long-sleeved shirts and long pants when at BFREE.
- **If you begin to exhibit cold or flu symptoms during your travel, please notify BFREE staff immediately and begin to use a face mask.**

STAYING HEALTHY POINTERS:

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NOTE: BFREE is not responsible for costs accrued during emergency medical evacuation or treatment.

FIELD STATION WISH LIST

Getting supplies to the jungle can be difficult and costly. We greatly appreciate when visitors considering packing a few of our most-needed items. If you have any questions, please email at contact@bfreebz.org.

Books and Resource Materials :

Help BFREE's Science library keep growing! New or gently used books, articles, or other resources are greatly appreciated. We are interested in materials that help students, researchers, and staff better understand the habitat, wildlife, and other aspects of tropical living.

Possible book and resource topics might include Field Guides for the tropics (birds, mammals, insects, reptiles, plants, fish, etc.), Laminated ID cards specific to the region, Tropical Ecology, Rainforest conservation, Agroforestry, Captive husbandry of reptiles (turtles in particular), Protected Areas, Watershed Ecology.

Items you may bring an extra supply of for your trip and leave behind when it is time to go home:

- **Batteries:** AAA and AA batteries are necessary at BFREE and are especially important in headlamps when our staff leads groups on night hikes. Unfortunately, batteries purchased in Belize are generally knock-off brands that don't last through more than a few uses.
- **Headlamps:** Headlamps are essential to functioning at night at BFREE. Living in the jungle full-time means, you burn through many headlamps because they have a limited lifespan in wet conditions.
- **Office Supplies:** Composition notebooks, pens, Rite-in-the rain notebooks, staplers, scissors, duct tape, masking tape, binoculars (new or gently used binoculars for use by staff and students)
- **Kitchen Supplies:** Kitchen towels, scrub daddy sponges
- **Home Spirit:** We love representing your school, organization, or hometown even after you leave. Items with logos or mascots useful around the kitchen are especially loved, such as coffee mugs, aprons, dish towels, battery-operated wall clocks, etc.
- **Great Gifts for Staff as a group:** Your favorite coffee, tea, or other snacks.

AMAZON WISH LIST

Want to donate supplies but have them shipped instead?
Check out our Amazon Wish List!

www.bfreebz.org/donate

